



STATE OF DELAWARE
STATE COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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March 25, 2010

Dr. Lillian M. Lowery
Secretary of Education
John G. Townsend Building
401 Federal Street, Suite 2
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Secretary Lowery:

I write on behalf of the State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) after receiving an informative presentation from representatives of a grassroots organization called *Making Language Choices Available to Delaware Families of Children with Hearing Loss* (also known as *Choices*). The presentation included, in part, concerns regarding Delaware's procedures and public policy for educating children with hearing loss. Based on the presentation and given SCPD's interest in promoting educational options for students with disabilities (including those who are deaf and hard of hearing), Council has the following observations, questions and recommendations.

1. Delaware's newborn hearing screening program and the availability of cochlear implantation for children as young as 12 months of age makes it possible in the 21st century for most children who are born deaf to attain typical oral and aural language provided such children receive intensive auditory-oral therapy as soon as possible after they are implanted. Moreover, because more than 90% of children who are born deaf have parents with typical hearing, the development of non-delayed oral/aural language skills is the preferred outcome for most families affected by deafness at birth. The State should provide people who are trained in auditory, verbal, educational techniques to work with the children and give the families the knowledge they need to develop listening and spoken language skills, starting at birth.

What are the Department of Education's (DOEs) plans for offering such an early intervention program in Delaware, given that one does not currently exist?

2. The distribution of resources for education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children is heavily skewed in favor of centralized education rather than in the local school districts where children reside. The slide on the next page displays data that illustrates this Delaware School for the Deaf (DSD)-centric orientation. About half

the school districts have neither an educational audiologist nor a teacher of the deaf. The percentage of Delaware children with hearing-based IEPs who are served in a segregated setting is about twice the corresponding percentage of New Jersey children.

What are the Department's plans for achieving a better distribution of educational resources for the deaf and hard-of-hearing?

Infrastructure for deaf education

- School districts
 - About ½ the districts have at least one itinerant
 - They serve about 200 mainstreamed kids
 - Nearly all kids use spoken language
- 620 E. Chestnut Hill Rd.
 - Staff (approximate #s)
 - 20 teachers
 - 26 paraprofessionals
 - 14 service/support
 - 10 interpreters/tutors
 - 10 administrators
 - Serve about 120 kids
 - New school under construction

The cost of a DSD education: substantially greater than that of a local school

DSD enrollment would be much lower if parents had truly informed choices and if resources were shifted from DSD to the districts or an intermediate unit

3. The Delaware Code and Administrative Code do not appear to specifically address the roles and responsibilities of the Coordinator of Statewide Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education.

What is the Department's view regarding the responsibilities for this position now and in the future?

4. Delaware uses specific school districts as the governing bodies for statewide special education programs for low-incidence disabilities. Examples include the Delaware Autism Program, the Delaware School for the Deaf (Christina), and the Leach School (Colonial). In other states, so-called intermediate units enable pooling of resources among groups of school districts. For example, Berks County Pennsylvania has about 70,000 students and 18 school districts, all of whom are served by an intermediate unit based in Reading.

SCPD recommends consideration of an intermediate unit approach to serving low-incidence disabilities as a means for using scarce resources in a more economically efficient way?

Thank you for your consideration and please contact SCPD by April 16, 2010 with your predispositions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniese McMullin - Powell". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a small flourish at the end.

Daniese McMullin-Powell, Chairperson
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

cc: The Honorable Rita M. Landgraf
The Honorable Vivian L. Rapposelli
Ms. Rosanne Griff-Cabelli
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Equality

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